

# The Best Verse of the Week

Poems Included in "From the Front," an Appleton Anthology

## Signals

By Gilbert Frankau.

The hot wax drips from the flares  
On the scrawled pink forms that litter  
The bench where he sits; the glitter  
Of stars is framed by the sandbags atop of the dugout stairs.  
And the lagging watch hands creep;  
And his cloaked mates murmur in sleep—  
Forms he can wake with a kick—  
And he hears as he plays with the pressel switch the  
strapped receiver click  
On his ear that listens, listens;  
And the candle flicker glistens  
On the rounded brass of the switchboard where the red  
wires cluster thick.

Wires from the earth, from the air;  
Wires that whisper and chatter.  
At night when the trench rais patter  
And nibble among the rations and scuttle back to their  
lair;  
Wires that are never at rest:  
For the linesmen tap them and test,  
And ever they tremble with tone;  
And he knows from a hundred signals the buzzing call  
of his own,  
The breaks and the vibrant stresses—  
The F and the G and the Eses  
That call his hand to the answering key and his mouth  
to the microphone.

For always the laid guns fret  
On the words that his mouth shall utter,  
When rifle and Maxim stutter  
And the rockets volley to starward from the spurting  
parapet;  
And always his ear must heark  
To the voices out of the dark;  
For the whisper over the wire,  
From the bombed and the battered trenches where the  
wounded redden the mire;  
For a sign to waken the thunder  
Which shatters the night in sunder  
With the flash of the leaping muzzles and the beat of  
battery fire.

## Before Action

By Lieut. William Noel Hodgson.

By all the glories of the day  
And the cool evening's benison,  
By that last sunset touch that lay  
Upon the hills when day was done,  
By beauty lavishly outpoured  
And blessings carelessly received,  
By all the days that I have lived,  
Make me a soldier, Lord.

By all of all man's hopes and fears,  
And all the wonders poets sing,  
The laughter of unclouded years,  
And every sad and lovely thing;  
By the romantic ages stored  
With high endeavor that was his,  
By all his mad catastrophes  
Make me a man, O Lord.

I, that on my familiar hill  
Saw with uncomprehending eyes  
A hundred of Thy sunsets spill  
Their fresh and sanguine sacrifice,  
Ere the sun swings his noonday sword  
Must say goodbye to all of this—  
By all delights that I shall miss,  
Help me to die, O Lord.

## When I Come Home

By Leslie Coulson.

When I come home, dear folk o' mine,  
We'll drink a cup of olden wine;  
And yet, however rich it be,  
No wine will taste so good to me  
As English air. How I shall thrill  
To drink it on the Hampstead Hill  
When I come home!

When I come home and leave behind  
Dark things I would not call to mind,  
I'll taste good ale and home made bread,  
And see white sheets and pillows spread.  
And there is one who'll softly creep  
To kiss me, ere I fall asleep,  
And tuck me 'neath the counterpane,  
And I shall be a boy again  
When I come home!

When I come home, from dark to light,  
And tread the roadways long and white,  
And tramp the lanes I tramped of yore,  
And see the village greens once more,  
The tranquil farms, the meadows free,  
The friendly trees that nod to me,  
And hear the lark beneath the sun,  
'Twill be good pay for what I've done,  
When I come home!

## In the Morning: Loos, 1915

By Patrick MacGill.

The firely haunts were lighted yet  
As our bayonets gleamed by the foe's wire;  
But the east grew pale to another fire  
As our bayonets gleamed by the foe's wire;  
And the sky was tinged with gold and gray,  
And under our feet the dead men lay,  
Stiff by the loopholed barricade:  
Food of the bomb and the hand grenade;  
Still in the slushy pool and mud—  
Ah, the path we came was a path of blood  
When we went to Loos in the morning.

A little gray church at the foot of the hill,  
With powdered glass on the window sill—  
The shell scarred stone and the broken tile  
Littered the chancel, nave and aisle—  
Broken the altar and smashed the pyx,  
And the rubble covered the crucifix;  
This we saw when the charge was done  
And the gas clouds paled in the rising sun,  
As we entered Loos in the morning.

The dead men lay on the shell scarred plain,  
Where Death and the autumn held their reign—  
Like banded ghosts in the heavens gray  
The smoke of the powder paled away;  
Where riven and rent the spiny trees  
Shivered and shook in the sullen breeze,  
And there where the trench through the graveyard wound  
The dead men's bones stuck over the ground  
By the road to Loos in the morning.

The turret towers that stood in the air.  
Sheltered a foe's sniper there—  
They found, who fell to the sniper's aim,  
A field of death on the field of fame;  
And stiff in khaki the boys were laid  
To the sniper's toll at the barricade,  
But the quick went clattering through the town,  
Shot at the sniper and brought him down,  
As we entered Loos in the morning.

The dead men lay on the cellar stair,  
Toll of the bomb that found them there.  
In the street men fell as a bullock drops,  
Sniped from the fringe of Hulluch copse.  
And the choking fumes of the deadly shell  
Curtained the place where our comrades fell.  
This we saw when the charge was done  
And the east blushed red to the rising sun  
In the town of Loos in the morning.

## Horse-Bathing Parade

By Corporal W. Kersley Holmes.

A few clouds float across the grand blue sky,  
The glorious sun has mounted zenith high,  
Mile upon mile of sand, flat, golden, clean,  
And bright, stretch north and south, and fringed with  
green,  
The rough dunes fitly close the landward view,  
All else is sea; somewhere in misty blue  
The distant coast seems melting into air—  
Earth, sky and ocean, all commingling there—  
And one bold, lonely rock, whose guardian light  
Glistens afar by day, a spire snow white.  
Here, where the ceaseless blue-green rollers dash  
Their symmetry to dazling foam and flash,  
We ride our horses, silken flanks ashine,  
Spattered and soaked with flying drops of brine,  
The sunny water tosses round their knees,  
Their smooth tails shimmer in the singing breeze.  
White streaks of foam round us to and fro,  
With shadows swaying on the sand below;  
The horses snort and start to see the foam,  
And hear the breaking roar of waves that come,  
Or pawing, splash the brine, and so we stand,  
And hear the surf rush hissing up the sand.

## "In Flanders Fields"

By Lieut.-Col. John McCrae.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

## War

By Leslie Coulson.

Where war has left its wake of whitened bone,  
Soft stems of summer grass shall wave again,  
And all the blood that war has ever strewn  
Is but a passing stain.

## I Have a Rendezvous With Death

By Alan Seeger.

I have a rendezvous with Death  
At some disputed barricade,  
When spring comes back with rustling shade  
And apple blossoms fill the air—  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
When spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand  
And lead me into his dark land  
And close my eyes and quench my breath—  
It may be I shall pass him still.  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
On some scarred slope of battered hill,  
When spring comes round again this year  
And the first meadow flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep  
Pillowed in silk and scented down,  
Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,  
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,  
Where hushed awakenings are dear . . .  
But I've a rendezvous with Death  
At midnight in some flaming town,  
When spring trips north again this year,  
And I to my pledged word am true,  
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

## A Song of the Air

By "Observer, Royal Flying Corps."

This is the song of the Plane—  
The creaking shrieking plane,  
The throbbing, sobbing plane,  
And the moaning, groaning wires—  
The engine—missing, again!  
One cylinder never fires!  
Hey, ho! for the Plane!

This is the song of the Man—  
The driving, striving man,  
The chosen, frozen man—  
The pilot, the man at the wheel,  
Whose limit is all that he can,  
And beyond, if the need is real!  
Hey, ho! for the Man!

This is the song of the Gun—  
The muttering, stammering gun,  
The maddening, gladdening gun—  
That chuckles with evil glee  
At the last, long drive of the Hun,  
With its end in eternity!  
Hey, ho! for the Gun!

This is the song of the Air—  
The lifting, drifting air,  
The eddying, steady air,  
The wine of its limitless space—  
May it nerve us at last to dare  
Even death with undaunted face!  
Hey, ho! for the Air!

## The Happy Warrior

By M. R. (Anzac).

In my sandy dugout by the sea  
Of Saros beyond the Samothrace,  
I'm as happy as happy can be,  
And I'm bent upon washing my face  
Before I go into my tea;  
But the water's so scarce in this land  
That we do all our washing with sand—  
And we always have sand in our tea.

In my fly filled dugout by the sea  
Near Anzac, beyond Samothrace,  
Both the cook and Colonel agree  
That you must have some semblance of grace  
At breakfast, at dinner, at tea,  
To prevent you from damning the eyes  
Of the savage and pestilent flies—  
For you always have flies in your tea!

In my shell swept dugout by the sea  
Of Saros, beyond Samothrace,  
I'm as happy as happy can be,  
Tho' the shrapnel comes flying space  
Over moorland and mountain and lea—  
For I wish you to quite understand,  
Tho' the hens have vacated the land,  
Yet we always have shells with our tea!

## Before the Charge

By Patrick MacGill.

The night is still and the air is keen,  
Tense with menace the time crawls by,  
In front is the town and its homes are seen,  
Blurred in outline against the sky.

The dead leaves float in the sighing air,  
The darkness moves like a curtain drawn,  
A veil which the morning sun will tear  
From the face of death. We charge at dawn.